

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 1869

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, TS

SUBJ: BOURGUIBA GIVES POLI SCI 100 LECTURE TO MARK

PROPHET'S BIRTHDAY

1. WINDING UP HIS TOUR OF THREE RURAL GOVERNORATES, PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA PRESIDED OVER THE CELEBRATION OF THE PROPHET'S BIRTHDAY (MOULED) AT KAIROUAN ON MARCH 12. HELD INSIDE THE HISTORIC OKBA IBN NAFAA MOSQUE, THE CEREMONY CONSISTED OF KORAN READINGS, SONGS PRAISING BOURGUIBA, AND A SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT. ALONG WITH LOCAL DIGNITARIES AND A LARGE AUDIENCE, THE TELEVISED CEREMONY WAS ATTENDED BY VARIOUS MEMBERS OF THE DESTOURIAN SOCIALIST PARTY POLITICAL BUREAU.

2. BOURGUIBA'S SPEECH WAS ONE OF THE LEAST INTERESTING THAT HE HAS DELIVERED IN RECENT YEARS. READ FROM THE MOSQUE PULPIT IN A DEADPAN VOICE, THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH WAS A POLITICAL SCIENCE LESSON ON THE MEANING OF "THE NATION," "THE STATE," AND "THE FATHERLAND." HIS DEFINITIONS OF THESE CONCEPTS WERE RELATIVELY SIMPLE. THE SPEECH APPEARED DESIGNED TO DEMONSTRATE THAT WHILE THE COMMON HERITAGE OF ISLAM AND THE CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC TIES

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OF ARABISM CREATE COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST AMONG MUSLIMS

AND ARABS, THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THEY OUGHT TO BELONG PER FORCE TO THE SAME STATE. BOURGUIBA POINTED OUT THE ADVANTAGES OF COMMON ACTION IN ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS, BUT SAID UNIFICATION IS AN OBJECTIVE DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE. BOURGUIBA MADE NO REFERENCE TO ANY CURRENT APPLICATION OF THESE PRINCIPLES. WHILE THEY COULD HAVE BEEN INTERPRETED AS COUNTERPOINTS TO LIBYAN PRESIDENT QADHAFI'S ESPOUSAL OF INSTANT UNIFICATION OF ALL ARABS, THEIR GENERALITY TOOK VIRTUALLY ALL THE PUNCH OUT OF BOURGUIBA'S REMARKS.

3. THE MOULED CEREMONY AND BOURGUIBA'S SPEECH APPEARED TO BE CAREFULLY ORCHESTRATED FOR MAXIMUM PUBLIC RELATIONS EFFECT WHILE HEADING OFF POTENTIAL GAFFES. ON TELEVISION, HOWEVER, THE PRESIDENT WAS NOTICEABLY UNANIMATED AND HIS FACE SHOWED SIGNS OF THE PUFFINESS THAT IS MORE APPARENT IN PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS. THE DULLNESS OF THE SPEECH CONTRASTED WITH BOURGUIBA'S PERFORMANCE AT THE MOULED IN PREVIOUS YEARS WHEN HE MADE IMPORTANT STATEMENTS ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN ISLAMIC SOCIETY, OBSERVANCE OF RAMADAN, AND SOCIALISM AND ISLAM. IT INDICATES THAT THOSE AROUND THE PRESIDENT ARE EXERTING INFLUENCE TO AVOID PUBLIC DECLARATIONS THAT EMBARRASS THE GOVERNMENT. THE SONG USED IN THE CEREMONY WAS A TRADITIONAL PAEAN TO MOHAMED WITH BOURGUIBA'S NAME SUBSTITUTED FOR THAT OF THE PROPHET. THIS CARRYING OF THE CULT OF THE PERSONALITY INTO THE MOSQUE, WHILE SACRILEGIOUS TO SERIOUS MOSLEMS, IS OLD HAT TO TUNISIAN AND PROBABLY BOTHERS VERY FEW.

4. AFTER ANOTHER DAY IN KAIROUAN GOVERNORATE REVIEWING GOT PROJECTS AND RECEIVING OFFICIALS, BOURGUIBA RETURNED TO TUNIS TO PREPARE FOR TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS ON MARCH 20. JUDGING BY THE PROGRAM FOR THESE CELEBRATIONS, BOURGUIBA'S ROLE DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE ANY MORE ACTIVE THAN THE ONE HE PLAYED IN KAIROUAN. RUMORS CONTINUE TO CIRCULATE THAT SOME MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENT, CABINET SHUFFLE, OR AMNESTY OF POLITICAL OPPONENTS WILL OCCUR ON THE 20TH, BUT IT DOES NOT APPEAR LIKELY THAT BOURGUIBA HIMSELF WILL BE UP TO THE KIND OF

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